Urban Management Centre

Making cities work for everyone

Reimagining Labour Chowks for Inclusive Cities

A Guidebook

January 2026

Prepared by

Urban Management Centre

Making cities work for everyone

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Reimagining Labour Chowks for Inclusive Cities.

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Urban Management Centre is a women-led non-profit organisation dedicated to building resilient systems for inclusive and equitable development. We work with governments to strengthen local governance and build lasting institutional structures. We also work directly with vulnerable people to ensure that they have the tools and support they need.

Over the last 25 years, UMC teams have developed fundamental innovations in urban development challenges such as municipal institutional strengthening, urban planning and climate resilience and capacity building.

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Daily wage negotiations between workers and an employer at a Bengaluru labour chowk.

Acknowledgements

Manvita Baradi

Founder and Director
Urban Management Centre

This Guidebook draws on extensive fieldwork, consultations, and collaboration with Urban Local Bodies in Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar, and other cities where the Urban Management Centre has been engaged.

We are grateful to city officials, labour associations, construction worker groups, and organisations working in this space whose knowledge and experiences significantly shaped this work.

We acknowledge the commitment of construction workers and their families, whose voices, stories, and lived experiences informed the recommendations contained here.

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The cement-laden foot of a construction worker captures the unseen realities of manual urban work.

Foreword

This guidebook is the outcome of a sustained and collaborative engagement with cities, workers, and institutions across India. Developed through close work with Urban Local Bodies, construction workers, labour groups, and civil society partners, it reflects a deliberate effort to bridge urban systems thinking with grounded, on-the-ground realities. At the Urban Management Centre (UMC), our work has focused on understanding how cities function as labour markets, and how informal hiring sites, often overlooked in planning processes, play a critical role in sustaining urban economies.

Across Indian cities, millions of workers gather each morning at street corners, junctions, and transit nodes in search of daily employment. These labour chowks are not incidental spaces; they are enduring economic nodes shaped by migration, informality, and urban growth. Yet, despite their importance, they remain largely excluded from formal planning, design, and service delivery frameworks. This disconnect has tangible consequences like exposing workers, particularly women and caregivers, to unsafe conditions, climate stress, and the absence of basic amenities.

At a time when cities are investing heavily in complex infrastructure systems and large-scale urban transformation, the continued marginalisation of the workforce that builds and maintains these cities is neither inevitable nor acceptable. If cities can plan for mobility networks, public transport, and high-density development, they can and must also plan for safe, functional, and dignified spaces for informal workers. Several city governments, including Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar, have demonstrated leadership in recognising labour chowks not as sites of disorder, but as legitimate urban infrastructure that merits structured intervention.

This guidebook translates years of field-based learning into a practical, spatially grounded approach for action. By combining city-wide mapping with site-level analysis, it enables Urban Local Bodies to identify, prioritise, and design labour chowks based on use patterns, footfall, and locational context. The framework outlined here supports the integration of labour chowks into existing streetscapes and planning systems, ensuring that interventions are context-sensitive, scalable, and aligned with broader urban development goals.

Ultimately, this guidebook is intended as a tool for cities to move from recognition to implementation. It offers a pathway to transform informal hiring sites into safer, more inclusive urban spaces, spaces that support livelihoods, enable access to services, and affirm the dignity of workers who are central to the life and growth of Indian cities. At UMC, we remain committed to supporting cities in building urban systems that work for everyone.

Woman standing at an informal, un-integrated labour chowk

About the Guidebook

This guidebook responds to the need for cities to formally recognise and integrate labour chowks as functional components of urban infrastructure. It addresses persistent gaps in planning, design, and service delivery that affect informal construction workers, while supporting cities in moving from ad hoc responses to structured, system-level interventions.

Grounded in extensive field engagement and city-level practice, the guidebook presents a step-by-step, spatially informed approach to understanding, planning, and upgrading labour chowks. It outlines a replicable and scalable methodology that enables Urban Local Bodies to integrate these sites into existing urban governance and development frameworks. In doing so, it positions labour chowks not only as sites of employment, but as critical nodes within inclusive urban economies.

This guidebook is primarily intended for city engineers, town planners, and municipal officials responsible for urban planning, infrastructure provision, and service delivery. It is also relevant for state governments, Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Boards, Urban Development Authorities, and technical agencies, as well as civil society organisations, NGOs, and research institutions engaged in policy design, welfare delivery, and urban practice.

The paint-laden feet of a construction worker captures the unseen realities of manual urban work.

1. Labour Chowks and Indian Cities

In Indian cities, daily-wage construction workers commonly gather at junctions, crossroads, pedestrian pathways, and transport hubs in search of employment. These organically formed hiring sites, locally referred to as Kadia Naka, Mazdoor Naka, Kooli Nirnidam, or Kooli Sthalam, have operated for decades as stable and recognisable points where workers and employers meet. While some locations shift in response to changing urban activities, many labour chowks have become long-established sites with consistently high footfall.

A large group of construction workers gathered at a Labour Chowk

1.1. What Labour Chowks Are and Why They Matter

Labour chowks play a critical role in sustaining urban economies by enabling access to daily employment for construction workers who build and maintain city infrastructure. Despite their economic function, these sites are often viewed as informal or disorderly and remain largely excluded from formal urban planning and service delivery frameworks.

The construction sector is the third-largest employer in India and a significant component of the unorganised economy. Nearly 90 percent of India's workforce is informally employed[1], with an estimated 4.47 crore workers engaged in construction, of whom 42.6 percent (approximately 1.9 crore) are based in urban areas. The workforce is predominantly male—84 percent (3.7 crore)—while women account for 16 percent (71 lakh)[2], reflecting both occupational segmentation and gendered barriers to participation.

Recent data from the E-Shram portal indicates that more than 30.4 crore unorganised workers have been registered nationwide[3]. However, registration alone has not translated into universal access to social protection, and significant gaps persist in worker recognition and entitlement coverage within urban systems.

A large group of construction workers gathered at a Labour Chowk

1 Indian Wage Report 2018, ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia and Country Office of India
2 6th Annual Employment–Unemployment Survey 2016–17, Ministry of Labour & Employment (MoLE)
3 Annual Report 2024–25, Ministry of Labour & Employment

A large group of construction workers gathered at a Labour Chowk

Employment patterns in the construction sector are characterised by high levels of circular migration and informality. Workers often move between contract-based and daily-wage employment, with consultations indicating that approximately 70 percent of workers rely on daily hiring through labour chowks, while nearly 30 percent experience extended waiting periods or return without work. On average, workers secure employment for 18–20 days per month, underscoring the volatility and precarity of livelihoods in the sector.
As urban economist Alain Bertaud has observed, **cities function primarily as labour markets**. Labour chowks, in this context, serve as a key but under-recognised interface between labour demand and supply in urban areas.

The welfare of construction workers is governed by the Building and Other Construction Workers (BoCW) Act, 1996, which mandates the establishment of State Welfare Boards and the collection of a 1–2 percent cess on construction costs to finance worker benefits. As of July 2024, over 5.65 crore workers have been registered under the Act, and nationwide cess collections have exceeded ₹1.12 lakh crore[4]. Despite this, a substantial proportion of workers, particularly in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh remain unregistered, limiting their access to entitlements[5].

4 Ministry of Labour & Employment (MoLE), 2024
5 Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India, 2022

The BoCW framework provides for a range of welfare measures, including accident insurance, healthcare, maternity support, pensions, education assistance, and rental or transit housing. There is significant potential for convergence with national schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Deendayal Jana Ajeevika Yojana–Shehari (DAY-NULM), enabling cities to better integrate housing, livelihoods, and social protection for Vulnerable Occupational Groups (VOGs), including construction workers.

A woman sits along an unpaved roadside, waiting to be hired as daily labourer.

1.2. Who Uses Them and How They Function

Labour chowks emerge organically across diverse urban landscapes, shaped by patterns of migration, informality, caste, and urban growth. They range from dense, semi-permanent hiring sites to fluid and shifting spaces located under flyovers, along road edges, near drains, or behind market yards. Their scale and spatial character differ across cities and neighbourhoods, shaped by local construction cycles and patterns of daily urban activity.

The primary users of labour chowks are daily-wage construction workers, many of whom are rural migrants from historically marginalised communities. These include both short-term or circular migrants who return home seasonally, and longer-term migrants who remain in cities for extended periods but continue to face exclusion from housing, services, and social protection. National labour force data reflect this structural vulnerability, with Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe workers disproportionately represented in informal and casual employment.

Labour chowks bring together workers with a wide range of skills, including helpers, masons, carpenters, electricians, and other trades. Skills are typically acquired informally through on-the-job learning and intergenerational transfer rather than formal certification.

A group of workeres gathered at an unpaved labour Chowk with its construction left half done

Employment remains precarious, wages are low, and work availability fluctuates. Many workers enter the labour force at a young age, while older workers continue to rely on daily hiring in the absence of pensions or safety nets, creating an intergenerational cycle of informal employment.

Women workers are present at many labour chowks but remain underrepresented. Their participation is constrained by the absence of basic amenities such as sanitation, shade, seating, and safe spaces for children. Women often arrive with caregiving responsibilities and experience longer waiting times or reduced access to work. These patterns reflect not a lack of willingness or capability, but the exclusionary design and governance of labour chowks.

Labour chowks typically function during early morning hours, with activity building between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. Smaller chowks may serve a few dozen to a few hundred workers daily, while larger sites can attract 1,200–1,500 workers, with footfall fluctuating based on weather, construction cycles, and seasonal factors. As workers disperse to job sites, activity declines and public space is reabsorbed into other urban uses for the rest of the day.

Understanding who uses labour chowks and how they function is essential for designing interventions that are context-specific, inclusive, and responsive to both worker needs and urban conditions.

At a labour chowk, women daily-wage workers wait for employment, highlighting the absence of gender-sensitive infrastructure in informal livelihood spaces.

A child accompanies their mother to the labour chowk, highlighting the overlap between livelihood and caregiving responsibilities in informal workspaces.

Ahmedabad

Quiet Strength at the Margins

Women Finding a Place, Slowly and Silently

They sit quietly, hesitant yet resolute. One young mother, educated till 12th, returns to the chowk with a 3-month-old, cared for by her own mother while she waits for work. “Had she not been here, I would’ve had to bring the infant with me,” she says. Like many women, she often waits all day without finding work, while men handle negotiations. Despite lacking basic amenities, their presence is steady—adapting, enduring, and determined.

2. Why Cities Must Act

Despite their long-standing role in facilitating urban employment, labour chowks remain largely outside formal planning, design, and governance frameworks. This gap has resulted in fragmented responses that neither acknowledge their economic function nor address the risks and exclusions faced by workers.

In Ahmedabad, 108 labour chowks have been operational for over two decades, yet remain unrecognised in formal city planning. These insights are drawn from focus group discussions (FGDs) held across five major chowks with daily wage labourers, women workers, and local stakeholders.

2.1. Planning, Design, and Governance Gaps

Four interrelated challenges explain why city-led action is both necessary and urgent.

1. Limited Integration within Urban Planning and Management Frameworks

Labour chowks are rarely reflected in statutory plans, mobility strategies, or infrastructure investment decisions. Their presence in dense urban areas is often treated as incidental rather than as an integral part of the city's labour and service ecosystem. As a result, cities lack clear mandates, spatial allocations, or management mechanisms for these sites. Evidence from Ahmedabad, where over 100 labour chowks have operated for more than two decades, indicates that the absence of formal recognition leads to ad hoc arrangements rather than planned interventions, despite their persistence and scale.

Men discussing work on a mound of debris accumulated at a labour chowk

A saree tied to a tree serves as a temporary cradle for a child, while families of daily wage workers wait for work under the shade, highlighting the lack of inclusive, women-friendly infrastructure

2. Absence of Gender-Sensitive and Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

Most labour chowks are not designed as functional public spaces. Workers are routinely exposed to extreme heat, heavy rainfall, and unsafe conditions due to the lack of shade, seating, drinking water, sanitation, and safe waiting areas. These gaps disproportionately affect women workers, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, and contribute to their limited participation. Climate risks further exacerbate these challenges. A significant share of India's workforce is engaged in outdoor labour, where heat stress reduces productivity and increases health risks. Without climate-responsive design, labour chowks will continue to reinforce vulnerability rather than support resilience.

3. Poor Integration with Street and Urban Design

Labour chowks are frequently perceived as sources of congestion or disorder, leading to their treatment as encroachments rather than legitimate urban uses. This perception reflects broader shortcomings

Construction workers waiting while sitting on road dividers among moving vehicles demonstrating the lack of safety and poor integration of Labour Chowks with Street and Urban Design

in inclusive street design, where public spaces are not planned to accommodate multiple users and time-bound activities. The absence of clear spatial organisation, pedestrian prioritisation, and defined interfaces with traffic and vending intensifies conflicts between workers, residents, and commuters, further marginalising labour chowks within the urban landscape.

4. Missed Opportunities for Welfare and Entitlement Delivery

The lack of formal recognition and basic infrastructure limits the ability of cities to use labour chowks as access points for social protection. Migrant and informal workers remain disconnected from welfare schemes, healthcare, and legal support, even when entitlements exist at the state or national level. As a result, labour chowks function as sites of employment without corresponding systems for worker registration, information dissemination, or service delivery. This disconnect leaves workers visible in the city's economy but largely invisible within its institutional frameworks.

Together, these gaps underscore the need for cities to move beyond reactive or informal responses and adopt a planned, design-led, and governance-oriented approach to labour chowks as part of inclusive urban development.

2.2. Labour Chowks as Inclusive Urban Infrastructure

As cities expand, labour chowks continue to operate outside formal urban planning frameworks, despite their growing presence across streets, junctions, areas under flyovers, road shoulders, and open spaces. These sites function primarily during early morning hours, after which the same spaces are absorbed into other urban uses. This time-bound and adaptive use of public space has allowed labour chowks to persist, but it has also contributed to their exclusion from planned urban interventions.

Located predominantly at high-traffic and high-visibility nodes, labour chowks present a clear opportunity for cities to move from informal accommodation to planned integration. When formally recognised and appropriately designed, these sites can transition from unmanaged congregation points into structured elements of urban infrastructure that support livelihoods while reducing conflicts related to safety, congestion, and public space use.

Planned, integrated labour Chowk with shaded area and seating where Construction workers can safely sit and wait

Streets and public spaces already serve multiple economic and social functions within cities, yet their role as employment-supporting infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Contemporary urban planning approaches increasingly acknowledge the need to integrate informal activities into city systems by removing physical and institutional barriers, enabling convergence across sectors, and responding to complex urban realities. Recognising labour chowks as part of this continuum allows cities to address informality through design and governance rather than exclusion.

At the national level, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, through the New Mission for Urban Poverty Alleviation, has identified labour chowks as a component of urban social infrastructure. By prioritising Vulnerable Occupational Groups (VOGs) and enabling dedicated budgetary support, this framework positions labour chowks as access points for livelihood assistance and service delivery. Within this mandate, Urban Local Bodies are responsible for planning, designing, and managing these spaces as part of their core urban functions. Effective implementation requires coordination between ULBs and Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards to align spatial interventions with welfare and entitlement systems.

Taking oral testimonies of Workiers standing and waiting at Sarkhej, Ahmedabad

3. Understanding Labour Chowks in the City

3.1. Identifying and Mapping Labour Chowks

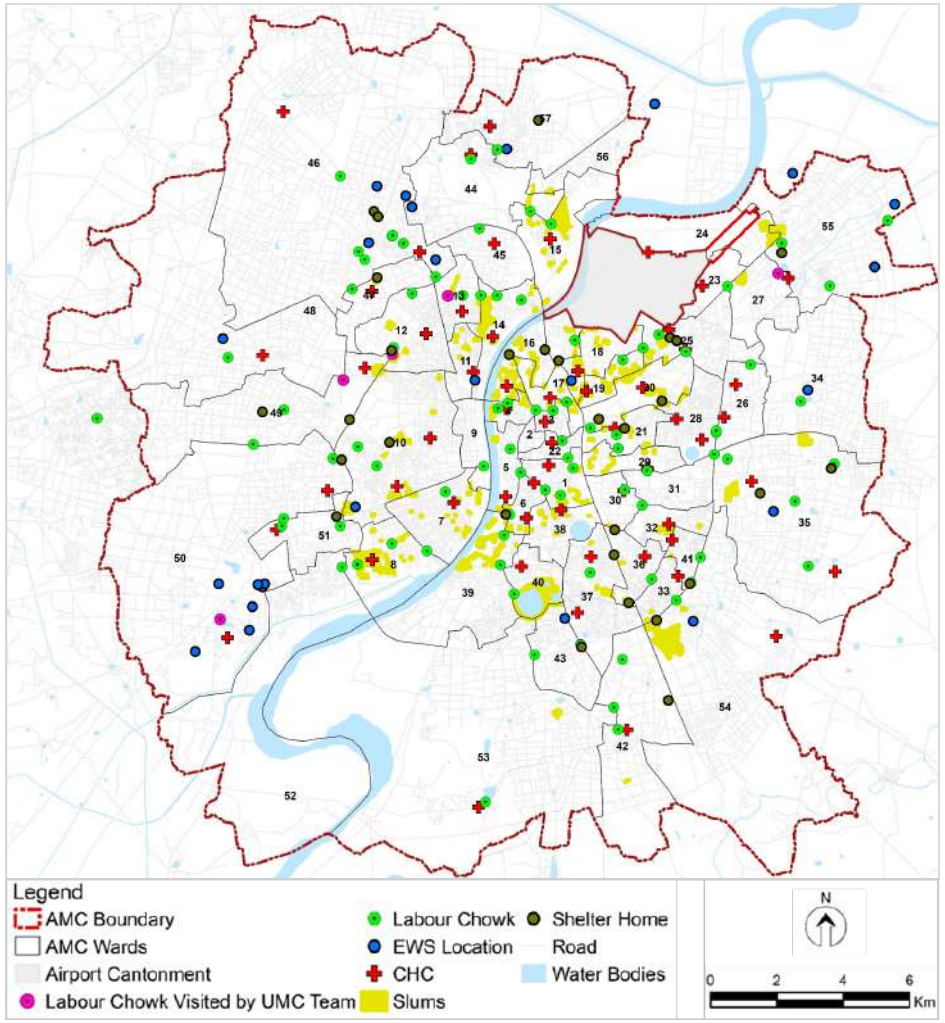
A systematic city-level understanding of labour chowks is a critical first step toward informed planning and intervention. By using Geospatial mapping and analysis, Urban Local Bodies can identify, categorise, and prioritise labour chowks based on location, intensity of use, and proximity to urban systems.

City-wide mapping enables labour chowks to be geolocated and classified as ***minor***, ***medium,*** or ***major***, based on observed worker footfall. This classification provides a practical basis for prioritising sites for infrastructure investment and design intervention, while ensuring that labour chowks are considered within broader urban development and streetscape frameworks.

To support this analysis, ULBs can prepare a city basemap incorporating key spatial layers, including:

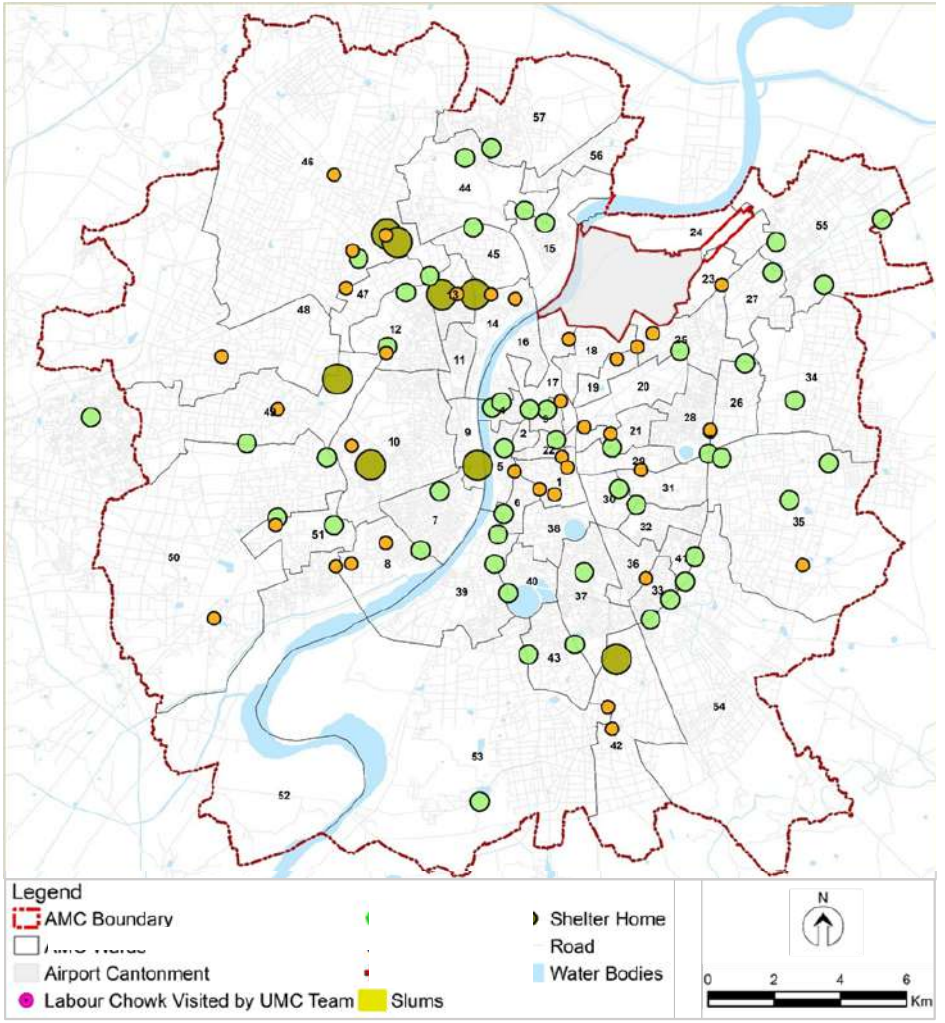
- Municipal and Ward Boundaries
- Major Transport Corridors
- Reserved and Environmentally Sensitive Areas
- Water Bodies
- Slum and EWS Settlements

Overlaying labour chowk locations onto this basemap reveals spatial patterns that are not visible through isolated site observations. Together, city inventory mapping and footfall analysis provide Urban Local Bodies with an evidence-based foundation for decision-making. These tools enable cities to move from ad hoc identification of labour chowks to a structured approach that supports prioritisation, phased implementation, and integration with wider urban planning and service delivery systems.



Map 01: Labour Chowk Placement, UMC

As illustrated in Map 01, labour chowks demonstrate a strong spatial relationship with slum and EWS settlements, highlighting the close linkage between affordable housing, migration, and access to daily employment. This clustering reflects how labour markets operate in practice and underscores the importance of integrating livelihood planning with housing and social infrastructure.



Map 02: Footfall Data, UMC

Further refinement is achieved through footfall mapping. As shown in Map 02, labour chowks can be categorised by worker concentration, ranging from smaller sites serving fewer than 50-100 workers to larger hubs accommodating more than 200 workers during peak hours. Footfall data, captured through time-bound manual counts during early morning peak periods, offers a reliable and context-sensitive method for understanding intensity of use and planning appropriate levels of intervention.

Sarkhej, Ahmedabad

Women Skill Development Enthusiast

“Kaam hi sikhata hai humein.”

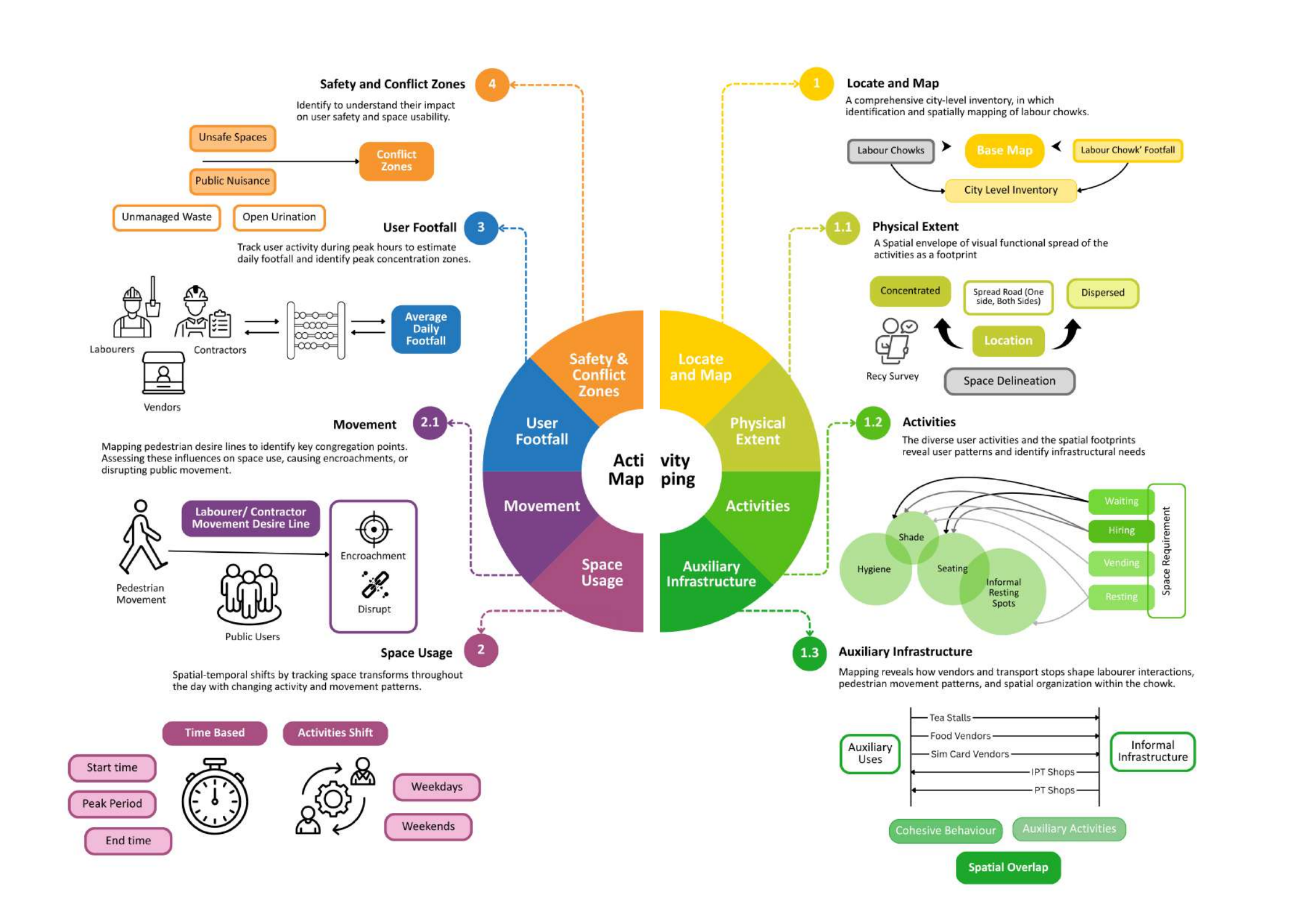
For ten years, she has worked as a tile fixer, learning epoxy and grouting entirely on the job. Most mornings, she waits at the Labour Chowk, finding work 10–15 days a month. With two children in government school, the ₹1,500 tuition is often a strain, sometimes forcing the family to borrow. Yet with her husband’s support and her own determination, she manages. Curious and eager to grow, she hopes to upgrade her skills for better work and a better life for her family.

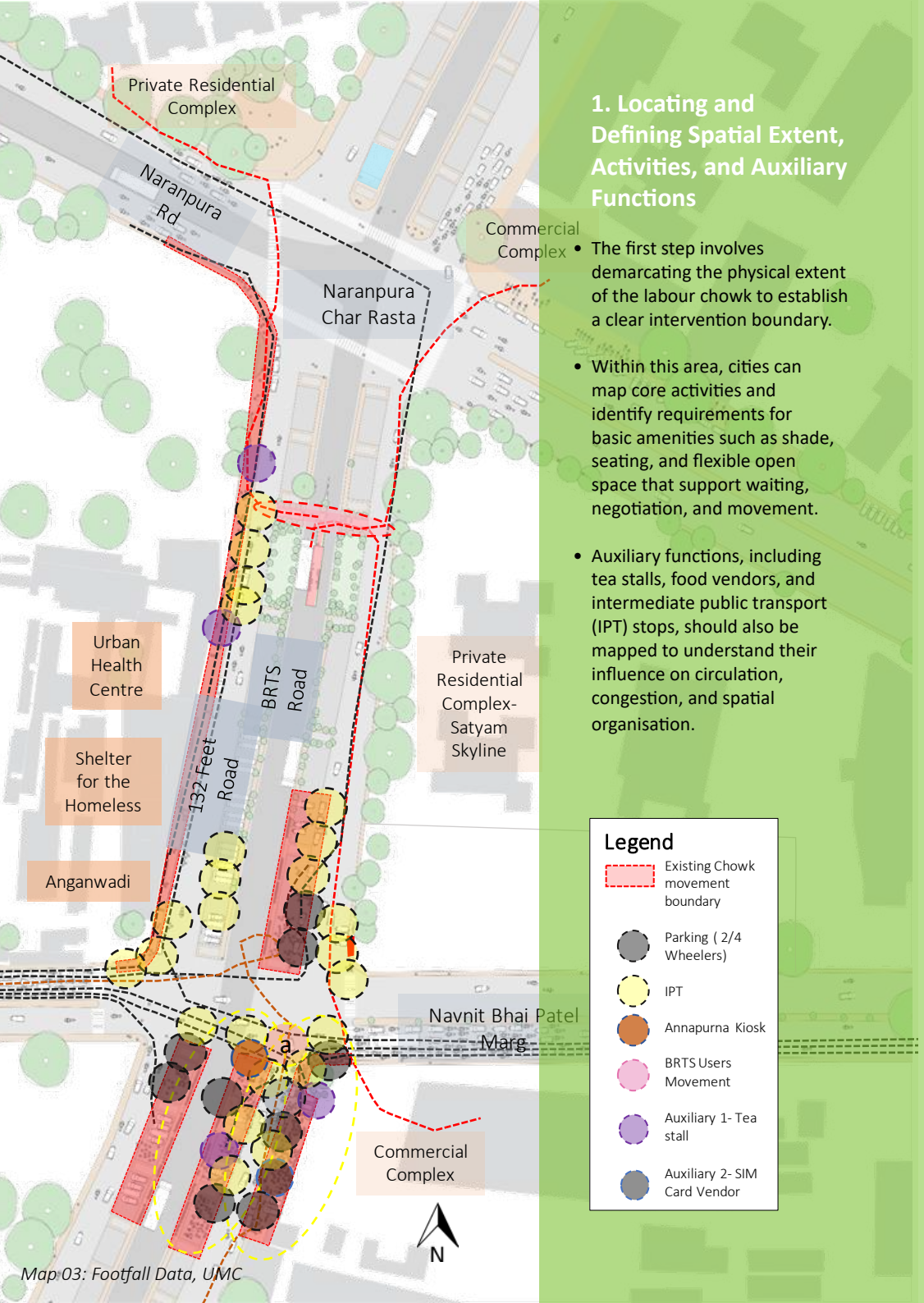
3.2. Activity Patterns, Risks, and Service Gaps

Activity mapping enables Urban Local Bodies to move from city-wide identification of labour chowks to site-specific understanding of how these spaces function. Using an activity-mapping tool, cities can analyse labour movement at both macro and micro scales, capturing spatial extent, user behaviour, and time-based variation. This approach supports evidence-based decisions on design, safety, and service provision.

Labourers sit on railings beneath the metro pillar and along the road median, highlighting unsafe waiting spaces.

Labourers create makeshift plastic/tarpouline shelters near labour chowks


Safety and Conflict Zones
4
Identify to understand their impact on user safety and space usability.
Unsafe Spaces
Public Nuisance
Conflict Zones
Unmanaged Waste
Open Urination
User Footfall
3
Track user activity during peak hours to estimate daily footfall and identify peak concentration zones.
Labourers
Contractors
Vendors
Average Daily Footfall
Movement
2.1
Mapping pedestrian desire lines to identify key congregation points. Assessing these influences on space use, causing encroachments, or disrupting public movement.
Labourer/ Contractor Movement Desire Line
Pedestrian Movement
Public Users
Encroachment
Disrupt
Space Usage
2
Spatial-temporal shifts by tracking space transforms throughout the day with changing activity and movement patterns.
Time Based
Activities Shift
Start time
Peak Period
End time
Weekdays
Weekends
Safety & Conflict Zones
User Footfall
Movement
Space Usage
Acti vity Map ping
Locate and Map
Physical Extent
Activities
Auxiliary Infrastructure
1
Locate and Map
A comprehensive city-level inventory, in which identification and spatially mapping of labour chowks.
Labour Chowks
Base Map
Labour Chowk' Footfall
City Level Inventory
1.1
Physical Extent
A Spatial envelope of visual functional spread of the activities as a footprint
Concentrated
Spread Road (One side, Both Sides)
Dispersed
Location
Recy Survey
Space Delineation
1.2
Activities
The diverse user activities and the spatial footprints reveal user patterns and identify infrastructural needs
Shade
Hygiene
Seating
Informal Resting Spots
Waiting
Hiring
Vending
Resting
Space Requirement
1.3
Auxiliary Infrastructure
Mapping reveals how vendors and transport stops shape labourer interactions, pedestrian movement patterns, and spatial organization within the chowk.
Auxiliary Uses
Tea Stalls
Food Vendors
Sim Card Vendors
IPT Shops
PT Shops
Informal Infrastructure
Cohesive Behaviour
Auxiliary Activities
Spatial Overlap



Map 03: Footfall Data, UMC

1. Locating and Defining Spatial Extent, Activities, and Auxiliary Functions

- The first step involves demarcating the physical extent of the labour chowk to establish a clear intervention boundary.
- Within this area, cities can map core activities and identify requirements for basic amenities such as shade, seating, and flexible open space that support waiting, negotiation, and movement.
- Auxiliary functions, including tea stalls, food vendors, and intermediate public transport (IPT) stops, should also be mapped to understand their influence on circulation, congestion, and spatial organisation.

Legend

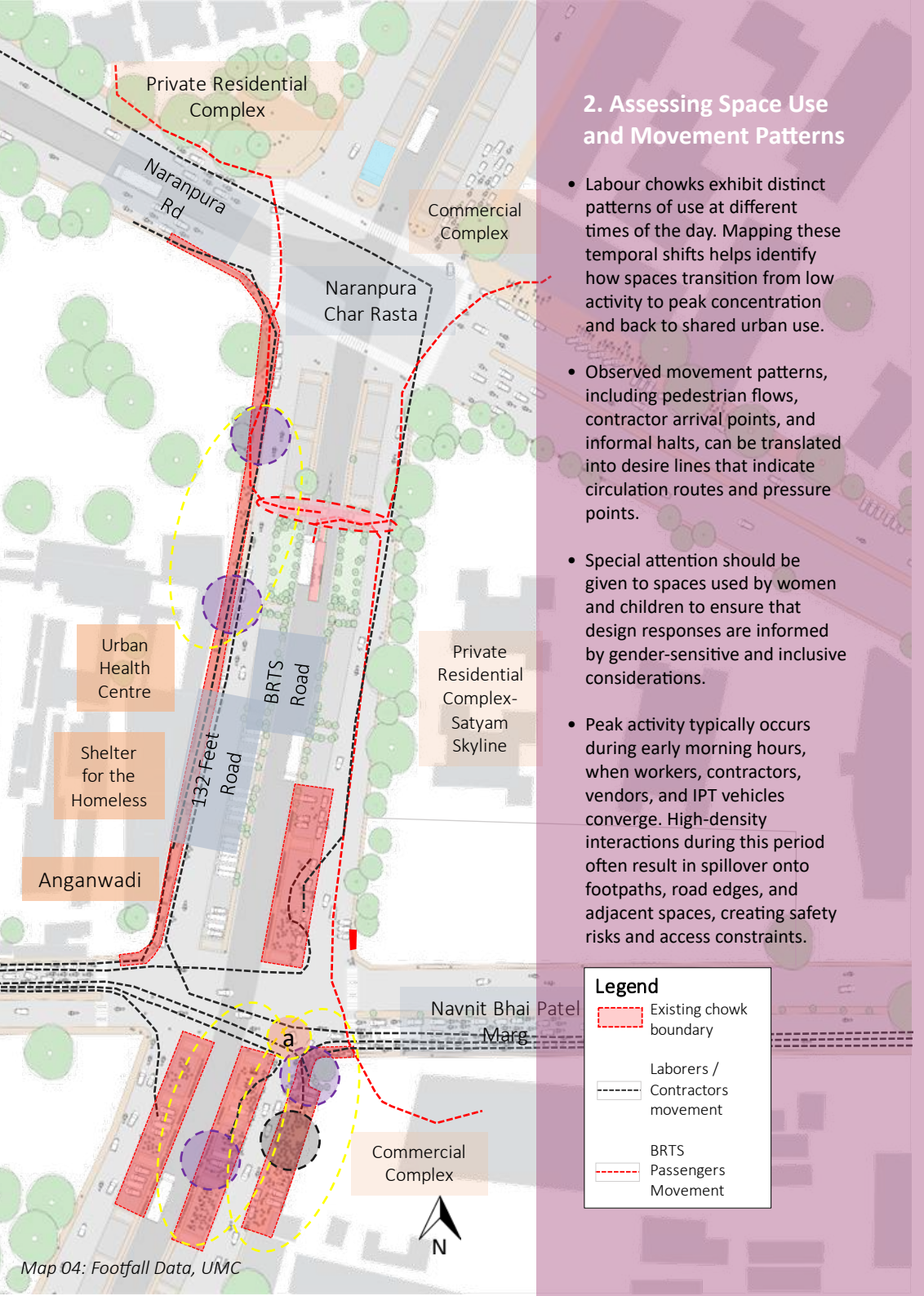
- Existing Chowk movement boundary
- Parking (2/4 Wheelers)
- IPT
- Annapurna Kiosk
- BRTS Users Movement
- Auxiliary 1- Tea stall
- Auxiliary 2- SIM Card Vendor

Worker and IPT activity beneath the flyover diverts pedestrians onto the roadway.

Pedestrian movement shifts to the road as overcrowded IPT halts and encroachments limit walkway access.

Labourers gather near a SIM card stall, illustrating overlap between informal commerce and worker congregation zones.

Waiting for contractors, workers stand under sun without shaded area.



Map 04: Footfall Data, UMC

2. Assessing Space Use and Movement Patterns

- Labour chowks exhibit distinct patterns of use at different times of the day. Mapping these temporal shifts helps identify how spaces transition from low activity to peak concentration and back to shared urban use.
- Observed movement patterns, including pedestrian flows, contractor arrival points, and informal halts, can be translated into desire lines that indicate circulation routes and pressure points.
- Special attention should be given to spaces used by women and children to ensure that design responses are informed by gender-sensitive and inclusive considerations.
- Peak activity typically occurs during early morning hours, when workers, contractors, vendors, and IPT vehicles converge. High-density interactions during this period often result in spillover onto footpaths, road edges, and adjacent spaces, creating safety risks and access constraints.

Morning Transitions at a Labour Chowk

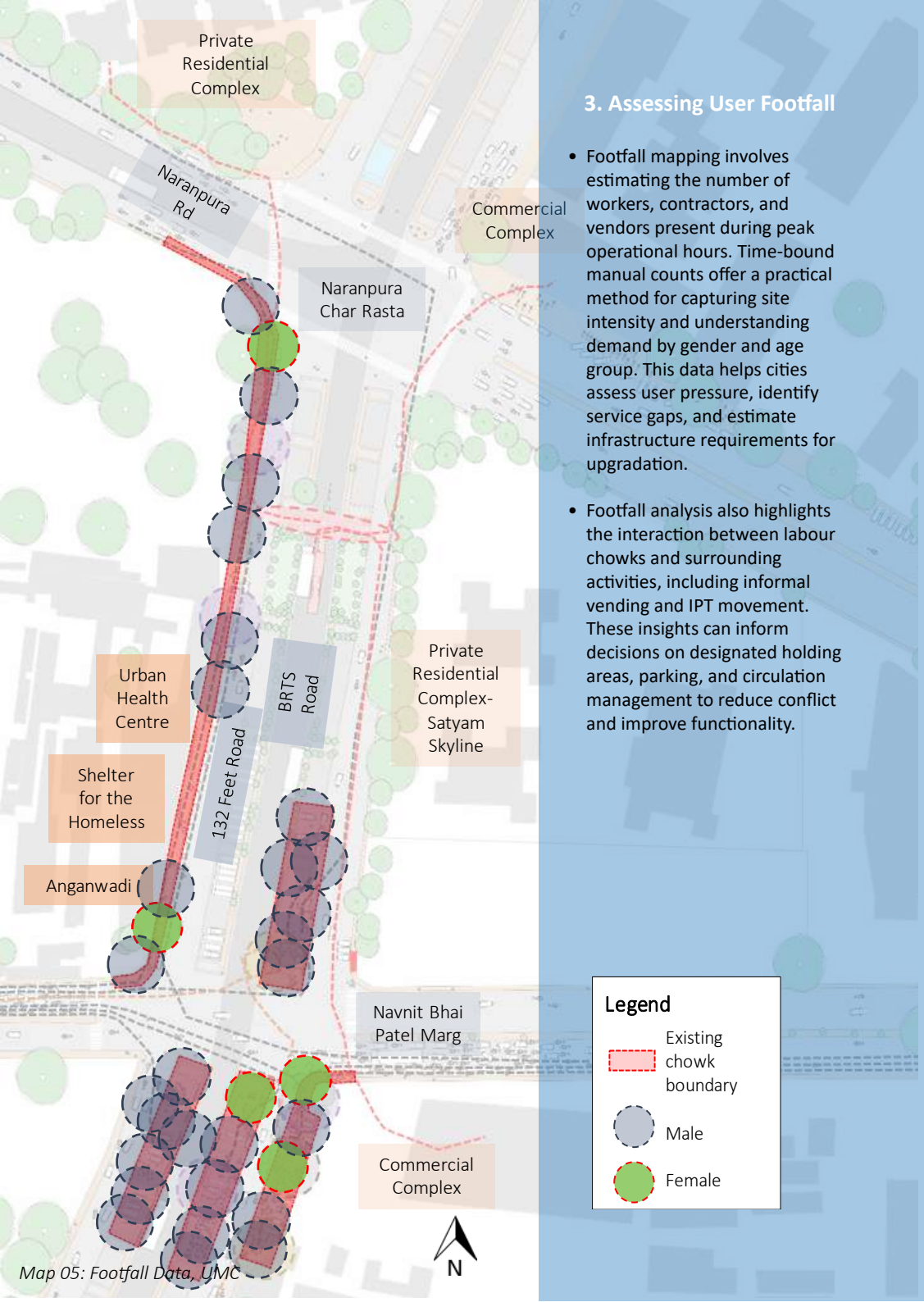
By 7:00 AM, early activity begins, by 8:00 AM, the chowk transforms into a densely packed naka, with large groups of workers gathering. By 8:30 AM, labourers occupy footpaths and spill into flyover spaces, waiting quietly for contractors. By 9:00 AM, peak activity unfolds. Auxiliary vendors, contractors, and Intermediate Public Transport (IPT) vehicles converge, driving intense worker–contractor negotiations. The site reaches maximum footfall and interaction, marked by high density and significant vehicular movement.

By 8:30 AM, workers gather on the footpath and spill into flyover spaces, waiting quietly for contractors and daily work opportunities.

Movement Patterns and Congregation Points

The movement of autos and shared vehicles (IPTs) shape the parking's entry and exit flows, often creating temporary congestion or informal halts. These transport movements indicate patterns of circulation, stops, and occasional blockages that affect site access.

Workers cluster at the chowk, waiting, negotiating wages, and preparing for the day's work.



Map 05: Footfall Data, UMC

3. Assessing User Footfall

- Footfall mapping involves estimating the number of workers, contractors, and vendors present during peak operational hours. Time-bound manual counts offer a practical method for capturing site intensity and understanding demand by gender and age group. This data helps cities assess user pressure, identify service gaps, and estimate infrastructure requirements for upgradation.
- Footfall analysis also highlights the interaction between labour chowks and surrounding activities, including informal vending and IPT movement. These insights can inform decisions on designated holding areas, parking, and circulation management to reduce conflict and improve functionality.

Legend

- Existing chowk boundary
- Male
- Female

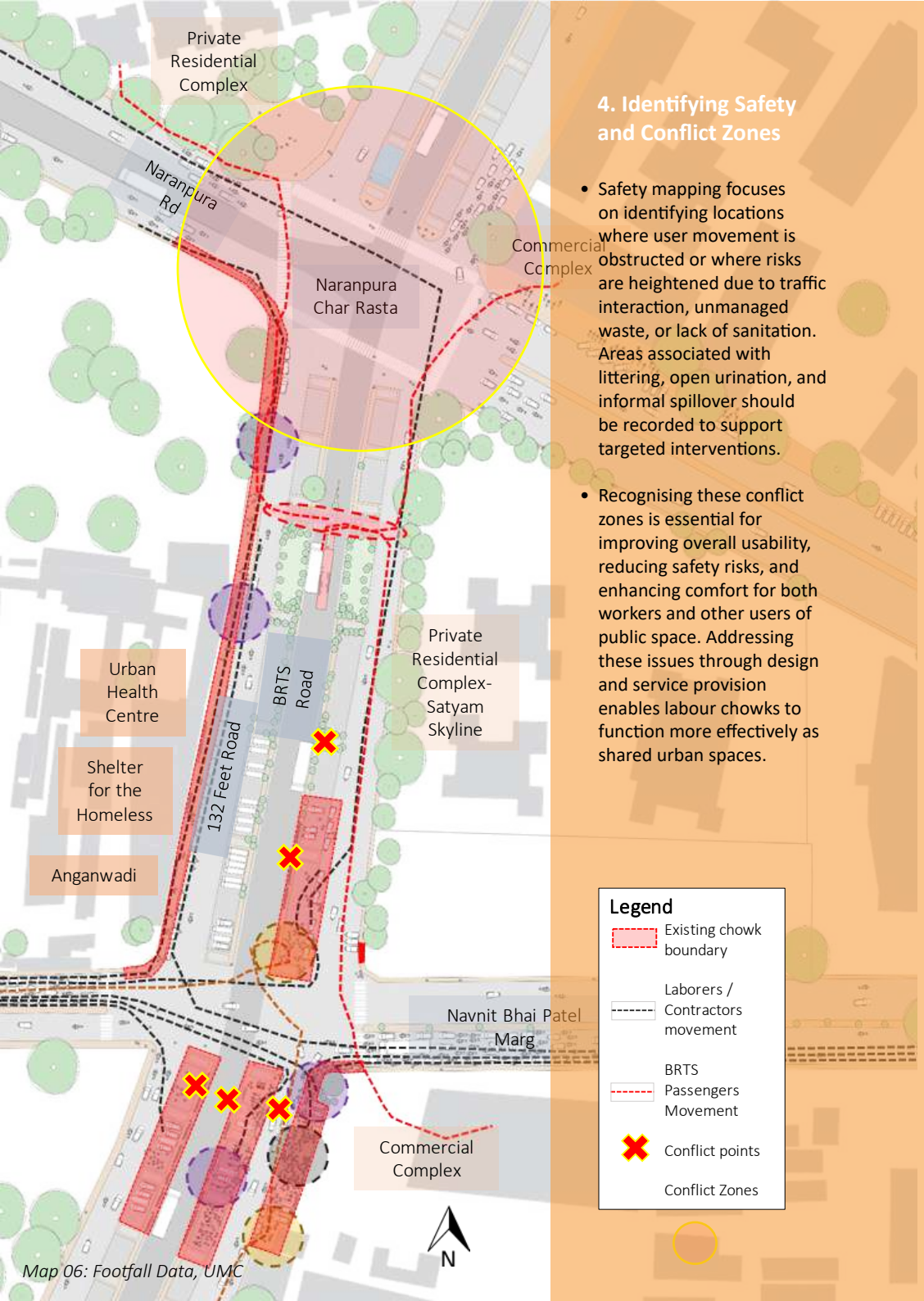
Labourers wait in groups, engaging in conversations and informal negotiations.

Negotiations between labourers and contractors take place in small and large groups.

Enumerating Footfall

This count-based method helps identify user pressure on the site, reveal spatial demand patterns, and inform gaps for infrastructure and service delivery. That resulting data provides an evidence base for understanding intensity of use, peak loads, and service needs. The Informal vendors, intermediate public transport (IPT) vehicles which are autos, also operate nearby. Designated parking and holding areas for contractors and labourers should be factored into site planning.

Workers gather and negotiate near IPT movement zones, sharing space with vehicles and pedestrians.



Map 06: Footfall Data, UMC

4. Identifying Safety and Conflict Zones

- Safety mapping focuses on identifying locations where user movement is obstructed or where risks are heightened due to traffic interaction, unmanaged waste, or lack of sanitation. Areas associated with littering, open urination, and informal spillover should be recorded to support targeted interventions.
- Recognising these conflict zones is essential for improving overall usability, reducing safety risks, and enhancing comfort for both workers and other users of public space. Addressing these issues through design and service provision enables labour chowks to function more effectively as shared urban spaces.

Legend

- Existing chowk boundary
- Laborers / Contractors movement
- BRTS Passengers Movement
- Conflict points
- Conflict Zones

Safety and Conflict Zones

Unsafe spaces, unmanaged waste, open urination, and public nuisances create conflict zones that compromise safety, reduce comfort, and discourage inclusive use of the area. Recognising these points is essential to address risks, improve amenities, and enhance overall user experience.

Labourers seated along the BRTS railing; informal use of space near flyover pillars highlights sanitation and safety concerns.

Workers congregate along the footpath at Valinath Chowk, Ahmedabad, underscoring limited designated waiting spaces.

Labourers seated on the BRTS railing and footpath, reflecting overlapping pedestrian and worker zones.

Ahmedabad

Community-Based Crèches and Urban Empowerment

Saath's Integrated Child and Family Support Model

Saath Charitable Trust, active in Ahmedabad for over 25 years, runs Community Resource Centres that empower the urban poor, especially women, youth, and children. This centres provide documentation support, scheme linkages, livelihood guidance, and child-friendly spaces for education and health. In Juhapura, Ahmedabad a dedicated team conducts household surveys to bridge gaps in access to services. Saath's integrated approach also supports entrepreneurship, migrant inclusion, and partnerships with government programs like PM SVANidhi.

4. Designing Inclusive Labour Chowks

Designing labour chowks requires a context-sensitive and user-centric approach that translates site-level insights into practical spatial interventions. Building on city inventory and activity mapping, this section presents a structured framework to support Urban Local Bodies in moving from assessment to design, while ensuring safety, inclusion, and adaptability within the public realm.

A child steps into a parent's slippers, echoing the cycles of labour and resilience, and the question of whether tomorrow's workers will face the same hardships or a more dignified future.

4.1. From Site Understanding to Design Response

Activity mapping enables ULBs to undertake a need-based design assessment that prioritises core functions, organises spatial clusters, and manages circulation and access. This process supports informed decisions on which design elements are essential, adaptable, or context-dependent, without compromising the primary function of the labour chowk.

The approach was piloted at Gurukul Labour Chowk to demonstrate how iterative site mapping, prototyping, and field validation can be translated into an implementable urban design response. The pilot illustrates how gender, safety, and functional considerations can be systematically embedded within public space design.

Two key tools support this transition from analysis to implementation:

1. **Design Brief Assessment Checklist**, which enables city authorities to convert observed needs into structured and actionable design requirements for infrastructure planning and costing.
2. **Design Feature Standards Reference Table** (Annexure 1), which ensures that interventions comply with national codes while remaining responsive to site-specific conditions.

Together, these tools provide a consistent basis for design decision-making across different labour chowk contexts.

Infrastructure Design Requirement Checklist

Key Parameters	Description	Status
Spatial Planning and Capacity design	Total No. of Labourers	☐
	Plan for 1/3rd seating capacity (of Total No. of Labourers)	☐
	Provide shaded waiting area - 2/3rd of Labourers (Total No. of Labourers x 1 sq./Per person)	☐
	Provide circulation and pedestrian walkways at (0.5% of site area)	☐
	Provide gathering space for flexible use (if space ~100 sq. m) at 1.5% of site area	☐
Safety & Accessibility	Demarcate pedestrian and vehicular zones	☐
	Install bollards at entry points (Space b/w)	☐
	Install street lighting as per NBC (30 lux min)	☐
	Provide 1.8 m wide barrier-free access on pathways	☐
	Provide tactile pavers and curb ramps at 1:12 gradient	☐
Basic Amenities	Provide public toilet within 500 meter with facilty for Male: 1 per 50 WCs, 1 per 20 urinals & Female facility with 1 per 50 WCs.	☐
	1 safe drinking water dispenser point	☐
	Twin-bin waste Collection points at every 50 m	☐
Livelihood Support Provide following spaces at Labour chowk	Government subsidized food kiosk and allot minimum 5 sq. m area in addition to user space.	☐
	Tea Kiosk (4 sq. m)	☐
	BOCW Registration Booth (2 sq. m)	☐
	Medical Check-up Van Parking (12.5 sq. m) – Space+ Ramp+ O&M	☐
Street Furniture	Shaded benches (450 mm seat height, backrests)	☐
	Designated stalls for 6–8 street vendors	☐
	Zebra crossings with reflective paint (either sides and eyelevel highlight)	☐
	Shade trees and landscaped softscape	☐
Parking	Two-wheelers : Four-wheelers/IPT- 3 : 1	☐
Sustainability Measures	Solar-powered lighting and kiosks	☐
	Rainwater harvesting beneath shaded areas – pit location	☐
	Greywater reuse system for irrigation	☐
	Daily ULB cleaning and maintenance provision – Annexure	☐

4.2. Core Design Principles and Spatial Components

Inclusive labour chowk design is guided by a set of principles that support safe, accessible, and multi-functional use of public space.

Safety and Accessibility

Clear demarcation of pedestrian and vehicular zones is essential to reduce conflict and improve movement. Design measures such as bollards, lighting aligned with national standards, barrier-free pathways, and traffic buffers at arterial and sub-arterial roads enhance safety for workers and other users.

Walkability and Circulation

Defined pedestrian zones aligned with seating, vending, and IPT access support smooth movement and visibility. Design solutions should be replicable across multiple sites while allowing for local adaptation.

Multi-Utility Zones

Seating and waiting infrastructure should support a range of activities, including rest, negotiation, and social interaction. Preserving tree cover and softscape elements improves comfort and contributes to microclimate regulation.

Placemaking and Public Realm Quality

Layouts should prioritise clear sightlines, continuous pathways, and flexible use, enabling labour chowks to function as shared urban spaces without enclosure or exclusion.

Interactive components such as low-level seating with back support, bollards adapted for seating, and railing-integrated resting elements demonstrate how infrastructure can serve multiple functions without obstructing pedestrian flow.

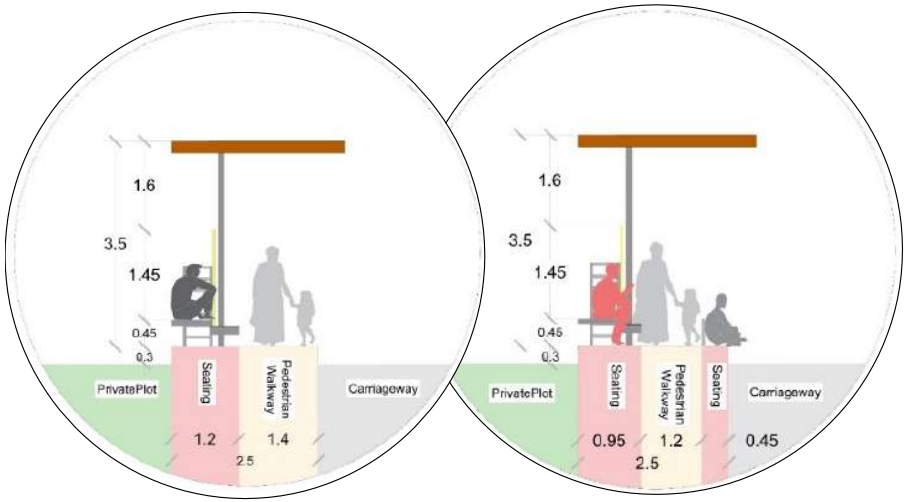
Public toilet located within 500 metres of the labour chowk, a facility available at only a few sites, highlighting the uneven provision of basic amenities.

Mothers seeking daily wage work often wait with their children at labour chowks.

Workers utilise informal seating areas, reflecting inadequate resting infrastructure at labour chowks.

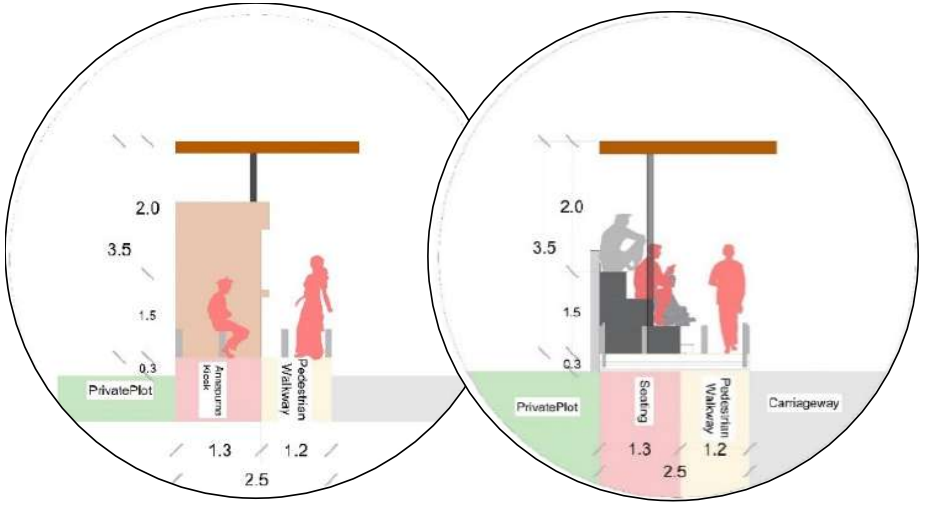
Low-Level Seating with Ladder Backs

Strategically placed low-height seating with back support (ladder style) lets pedestrians and labourers rest briefly without obstructing walking paths.



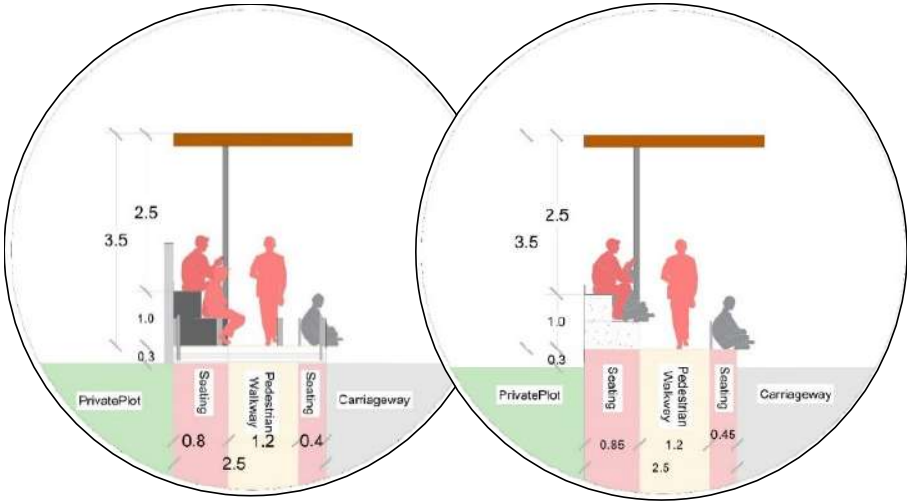
Bollards as Seating

Bollards double as informal seating, adding multifunctional use to public infrastructure.



Railing Seating Integration

Railings adapted for seating add resting space and increase capacity without disrupting pedestrian flow.



4.3. Adaptable Design Approaches: Gurukul Labour Chowk

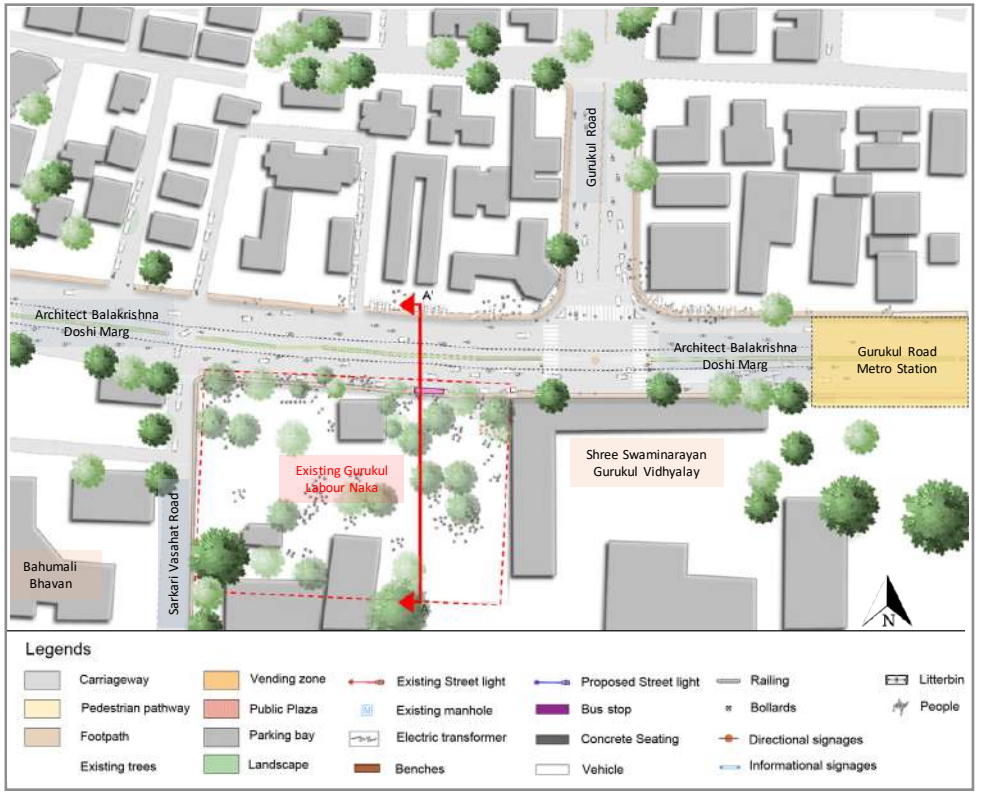
The Gurukul Labour Chowk pilot demonstrates how the design framework can be applied to a dynamic urban site with multiple daily functions. In the morning, the site operates as a labour chowk; during the day, it transitions into a shaded waiting and resting space; and by evening, it supports vending activity. High footfall and proximity to institutional uses make it well suited for pedestrian-oriented design.

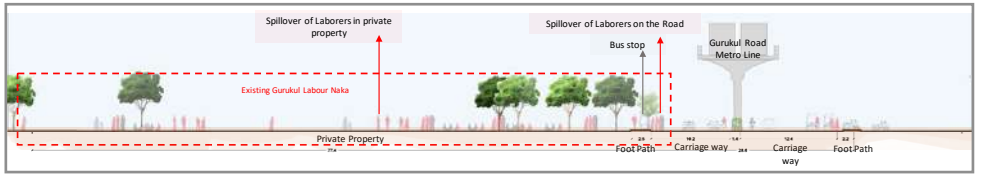
This pilot demonstrates how labour chowks can be transformed into organised, inclusive, and functional public spaces through design-led planning grounded in local conditions

Gurukul Labour Naka 'Ground'

Existing Chowk Map

Gurukul Labour Naka Map

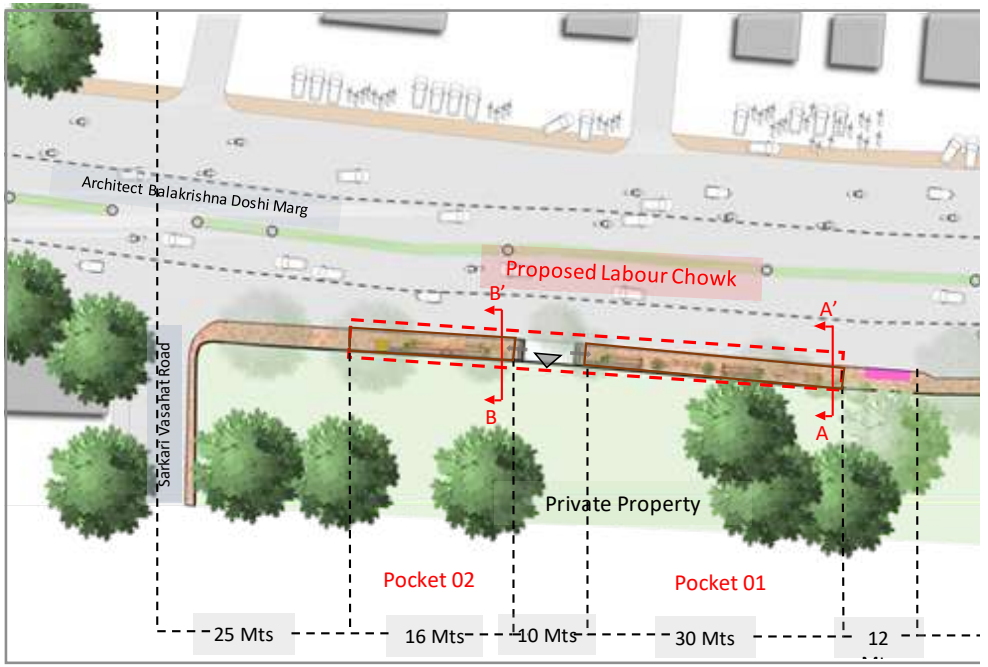


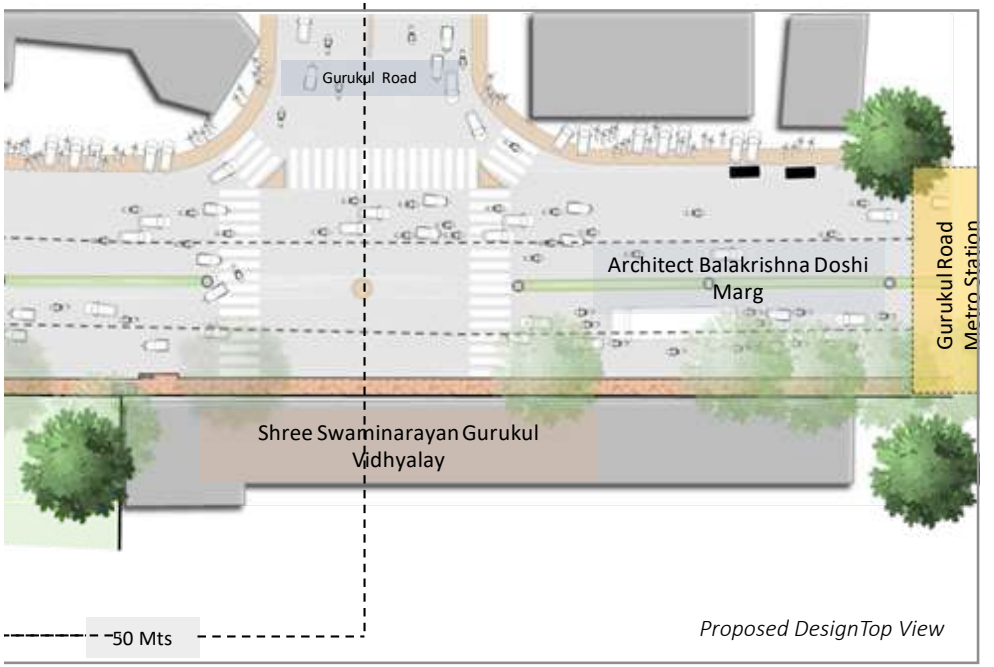


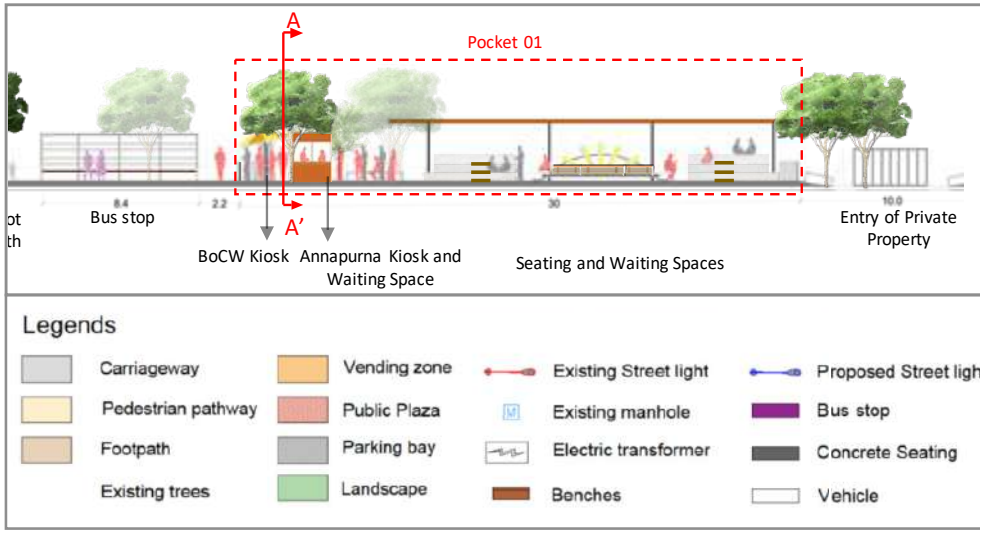
Gurukul Labour Naka Section View

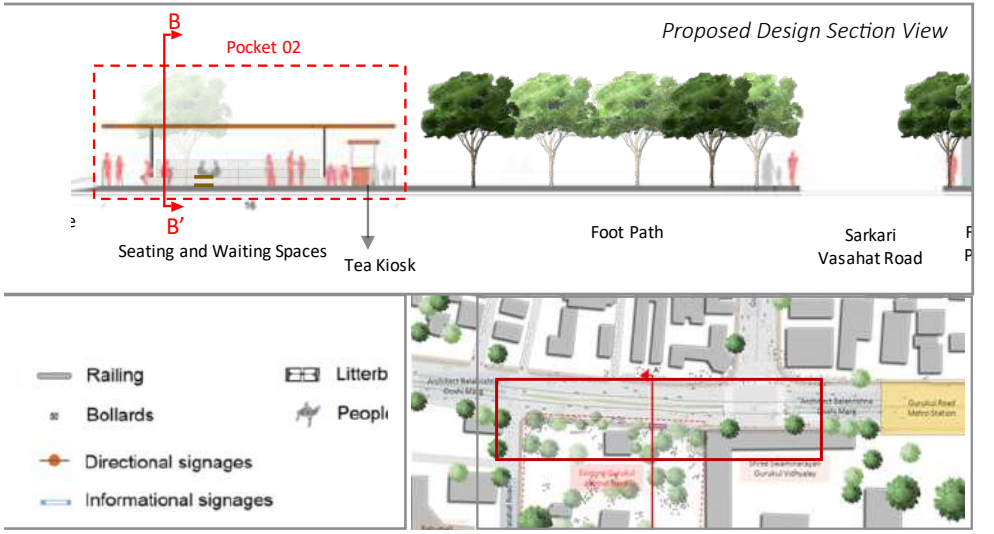
Drawing reference from earlier the activity mapping into need-based assessment checklist and Design Feature Standards Reference Table the site was assessed as a dynamic public space.

Proposed Chowk Design



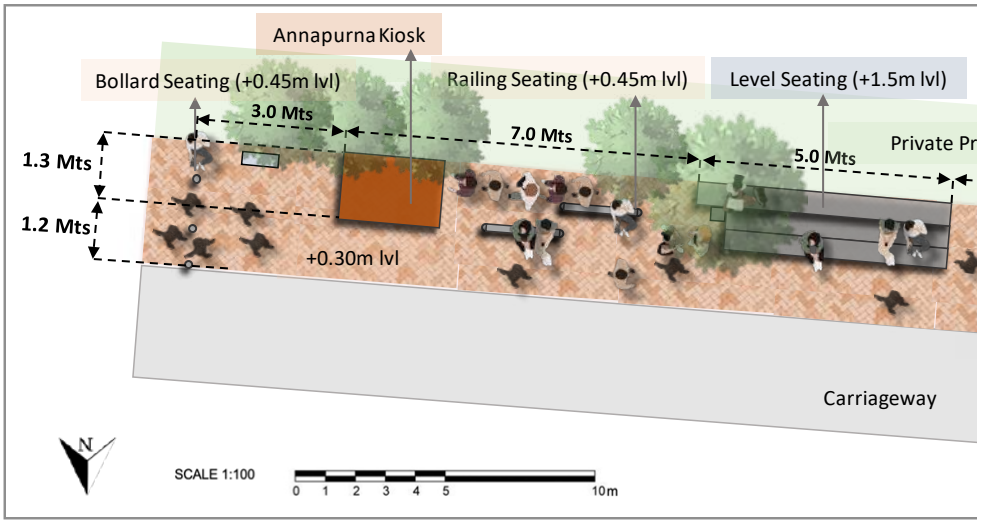


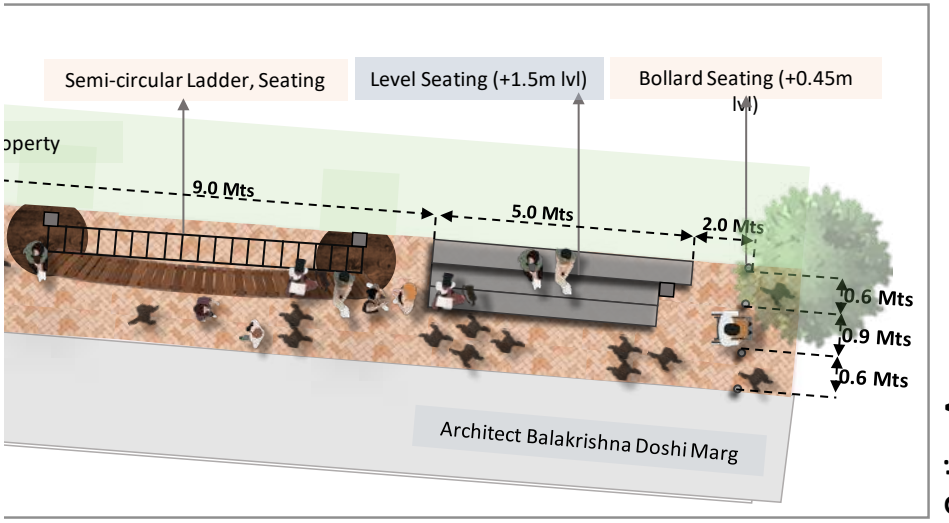




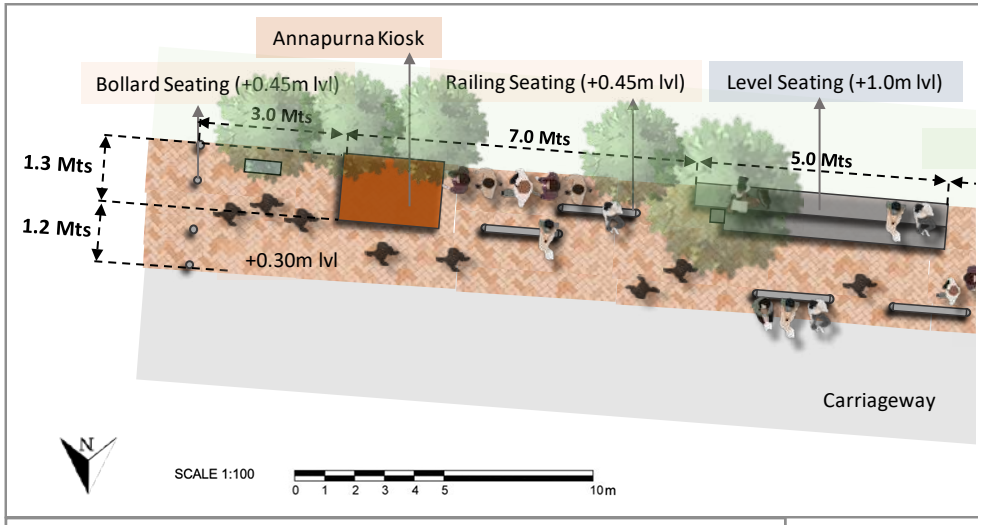
The proposed design organises labour activity within the public realm while maintaining clear access to adjacent private plots. Buffer distances along arterial and sub-arterial roads improve safety and visibility. Spatial pockets are defined based on available space and footfall, with seating provision calibrated to approximately one-third of peak users. Waiting, vending, and circulation areas are arranged to prevent obstruction of pedestrian movement.

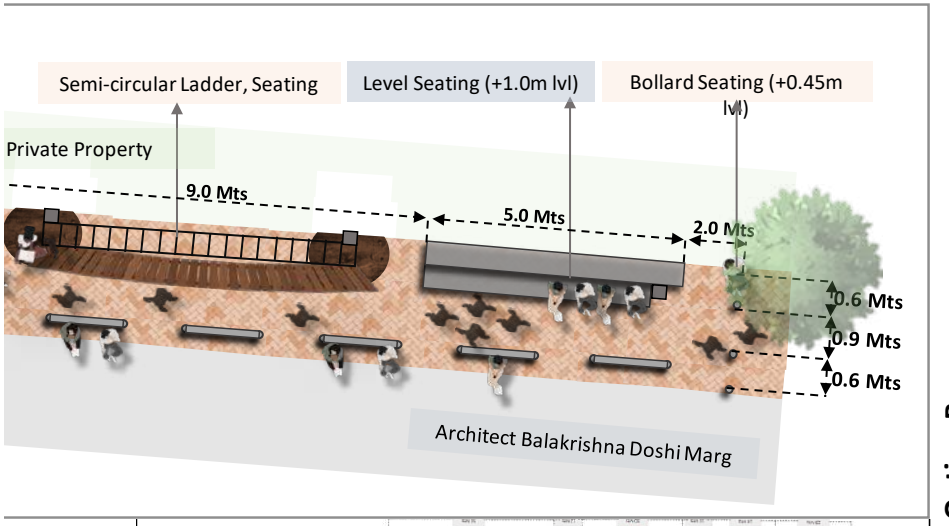
Proposed Pocket 01 Design



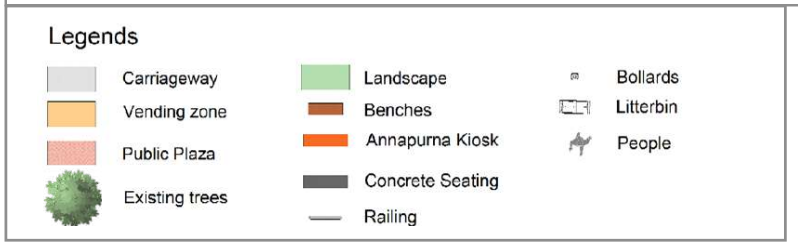


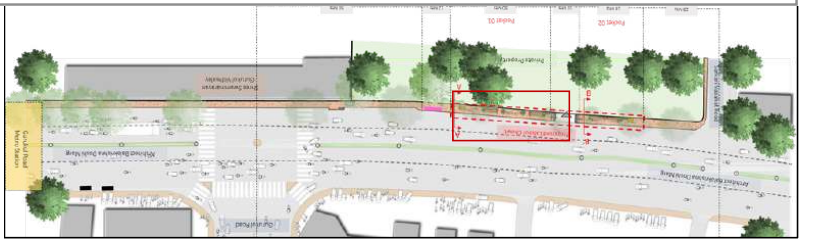
Option A





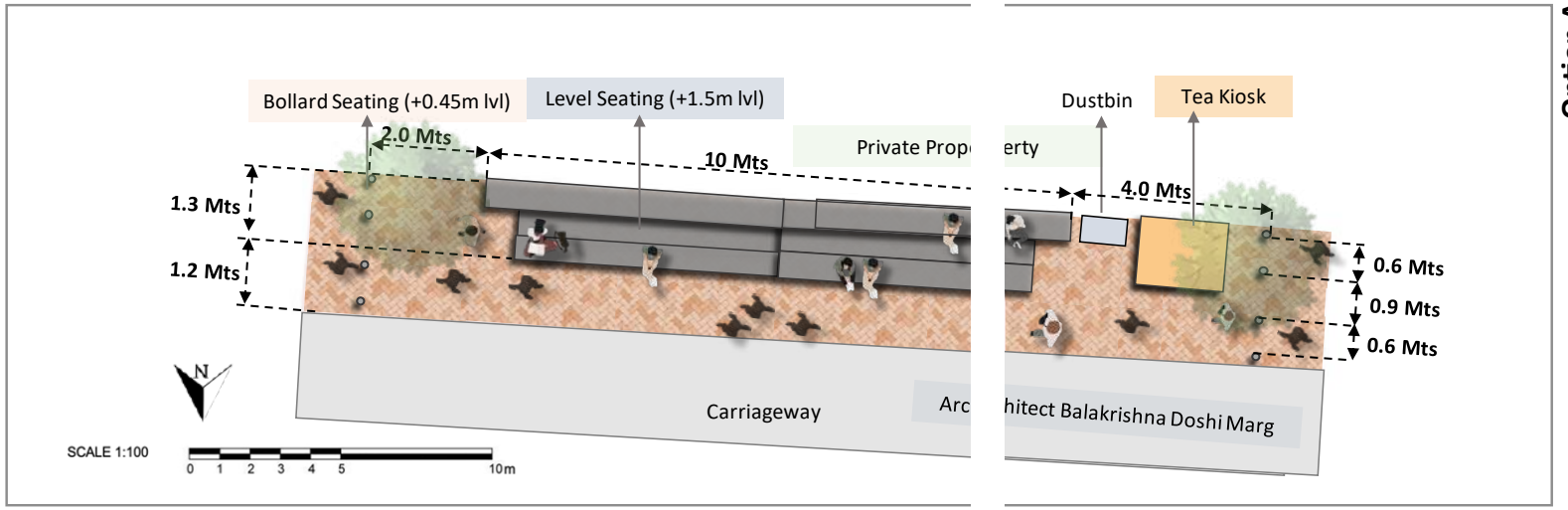
Option B

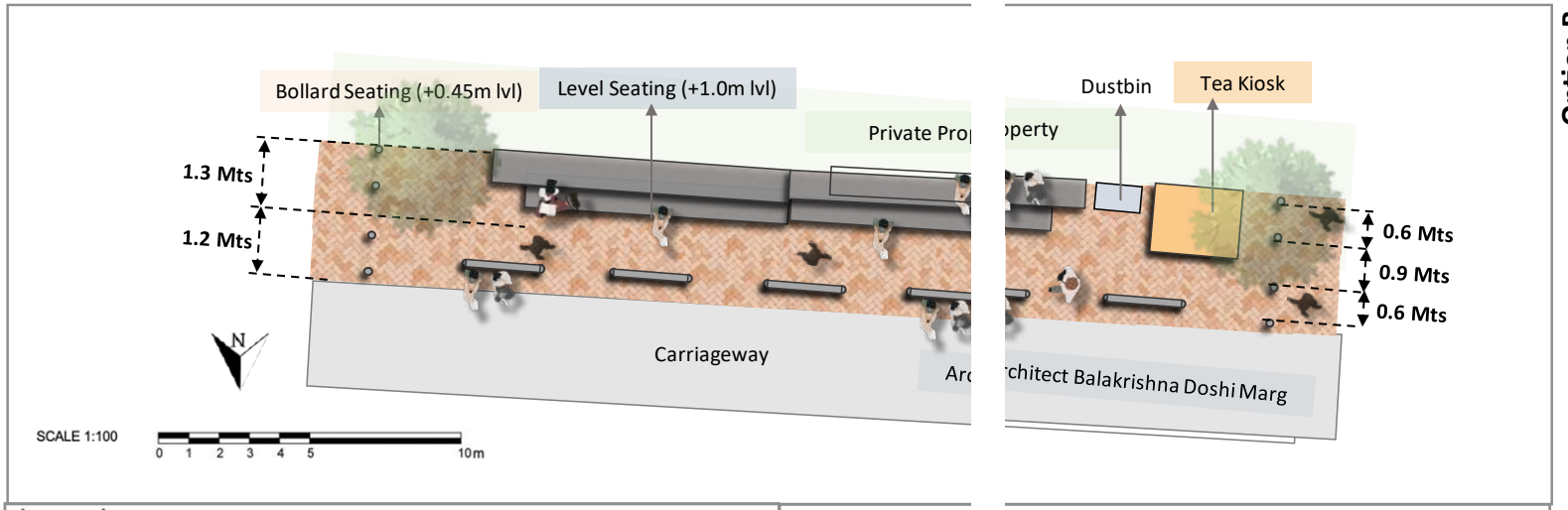


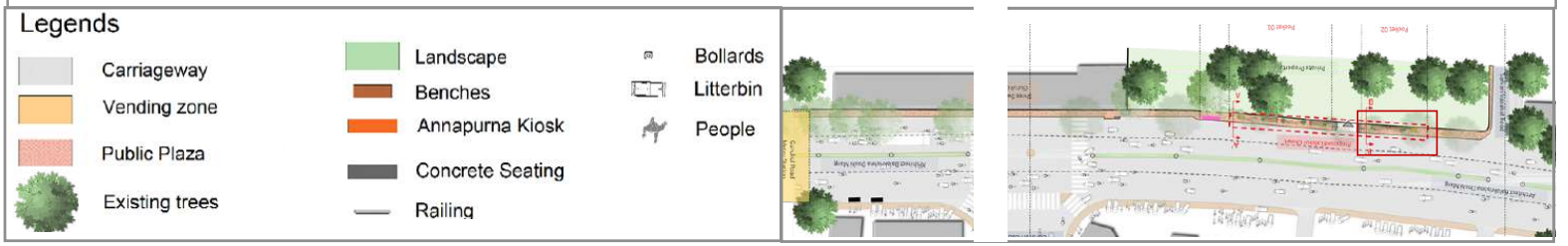


Key Map

Proposed Pocket 02 Design







Key Map

- Pocket-level designs illustrate climate-responsive strategies, including the integration of natural shade, preserved trees, and low platforms to support comfort and informal interaction.
- Essential services such as drinking water, sanitation, power, drainage, and lighting are coordinated through careful mapping to ensure safe installation and efficient operation.
- Signage displaying wage information and working hours supports transparency and reduces unmanaged spillover.

Ahmedabad

Sarkhej – A Place to Stand, A Name to Call

Finding Recognition and Routine at the Everyday Labour Chowk

The Labour Chowk is more than a workplace—it is a space of identity and belonging. “This place makes me feel seen,” he says with quiet pride. Even when work is scarce, he stays, holding his E-Shram card as a mark of recognition. For him, the chowk offers dignity, routine, and the assurance that opportunities will find him here.

5. Way Forward

Reimagining labour chowks requires cities to move beyond isolated interventions towards a systematic approach that integrates informality into urban planning, design, and governance. The pathway ahead focuses on two complementary priorities: scaling interventions across cities and embedding labour chowks within formal urban systems.

Workers enthusiastically waiting for their turn to give their testimonies at Sarkhej, Ahmedabad

5.1. Scaling Across Cities

Scaling labour chowk interventions requires a phased and evidence-driven approach. City-wide inventories and prioritisation frameworks enable Urban Local Bodies to identify high-need sites and sequence investments based on risk, footfall, and context. Early actions should focus on replicating proven design and governance models at select high-impact locations, demonstrating feasibility while building institutional confidence.

1. **Pilot implementations**, such as the Gurukul Labour Chowk model, provide a reference for adaptation across different urban contexts. Scaling should emphasise modular and cost-efficient design elements, tactical safety measures, and standardised assessment tools that allow cities to respond quickly while maintaining consistency. Over time, these pilots can inform city-wide rollouts that progressively cover minor, medium, and major labour chowks.

2. **Collaboration with State governments and Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Boards** is critical to support scaling. Aligning infrastructure investments with available welfare funding and institutional mandates enables cities to extend improvements without duplicating efforts or creating parallel systems.

5.2. Embedding Labour Chowks into Urban Planning Systems

For long-term impact, labour chowks must be formally recognised within urban planning and management frameworks. This includes integrating them into statutory plans, mobility strategies, and municipal budgeting processes as legitimate components of urban infrastructure. Formal recognition shifts labour chowks from being managed through ad hoc arrangements to being planned, designed, and maintained through established city systems.

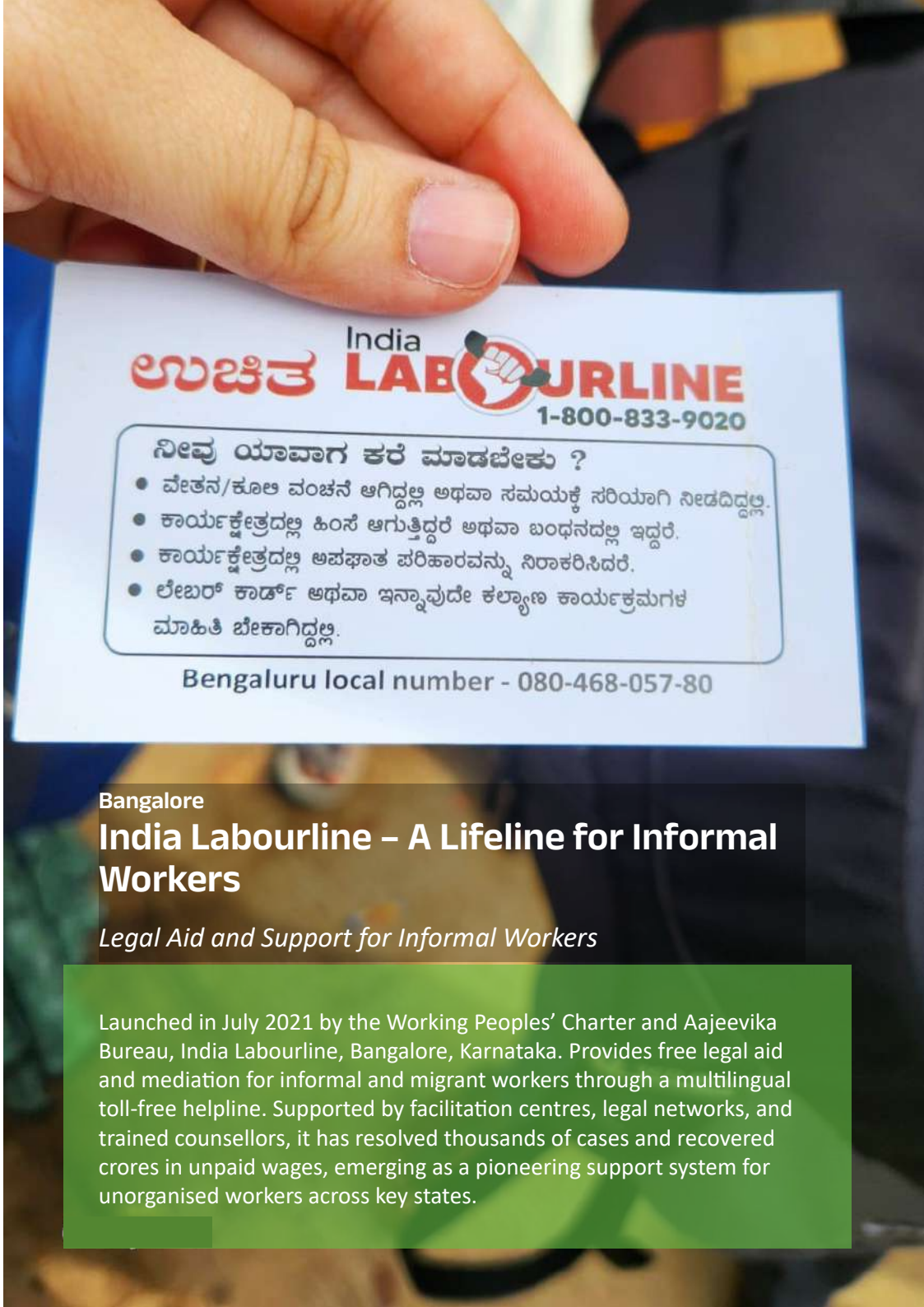
Embedding labour chowks also enables convergence with social protection and service delivery mechanisms. Larger and higher-footfall sites can function as access points for worker registration, healthcare outreach, and information dissemination, strengthening links between livelihoods, housing, and welfare. Design standards and maintenance protocols anchored in municipal systems further ensure sustainability beyond project cycles.

Mobile health van offering regular medical check-ups at the Naroda Labour Chowk, Ahmedabad.

Labourers sitting on logs and trees neaxt to a food stall near a labour Chowk

Institutional capacity-building is a key enabler of this transition. Equipping municipal engineers, planners, and field staff with tools to manage informal labour spaces as part of their core responsibilities supports durable change. Partnerships with civil society organisations and worker representatives can strengthen local ownership, improve maintenance, and ensure that interventions remain responsive to worker needs.

Together, these steps provide a roadmap for cities to transition from fragmented responses to an integrated approach that recognises labour chowks as essential to inclusive urban development.



Bangalore

India Labourline – A Lifeline for Informal Workers

Legal Aid and Support for Informal Workers

Launched in July 2021 by the Working Peoples' Charter and Aajeevika Bureau, India Labourline, Bangalore, Karnataka. Provides free legal aid and mediation for informal and migrant workers through a multilingual toll-free helpline. Supported by facilitation centres, legal networks, and trained counsellors, it has resolved thousands of cases and recovered crores in unpaid wages, emerging as a pioneering support system for unorganised workers across key states.

Annexures

Assessment Framework

The current In-situ conditions allow cities to assess the status of each Chowk and highlight sites demanding prompt intervention. The scoring matrix converts spatial observations into actionable insights, assessing each Labour Chowk's performance against planning and operational parameters. More than a scorecard, it serves as a strategic tool; combining qualitative spatial typologies with quantitative ratings to help cities prioritise interventions.

Parameters for Assessing Labour Chowks	Developed Chowks		Un developed Labour Naka's		
	Naroda	Sarkhej	Valinathnagar	Gurukul	Akhbarnagar
1. Location and accessibility					
a. Proximity to social infrastructure					
i. Health centre	4	4	4	0	0
ii. Anganwadi	4	0	4	0	0
iii. Primary school	4	4	0	0	0
iv. SUH	4	4	4	0	0
b. Access to public transport	5	5	5	5	5
2. Infrastructure and Service Provision					
a. Availability of Shaded Area (Tree Cover/Shed)	5	3	1	1	0
b. Seating Facilities	5	3	0	0	0
c. Access to Drinking Water	5	2	0	0	0
d. Toilets Facilities	5	0	0	0	4
e. Subsidised canteen	5	5	5	4	4
f. Tea/Snack/Food Kiosks	5	3	3	3	4
g. Parking Space	5	3	4	0	0
h. Medical check-up van/ Kiosk	5	5	3	3	3
i. BoCW Registration Desk	4	3	2	0	0
3. O&M					
a. Cleanliness - Waste Management, Water logging	5	5	2	3	3
4. Urban Risk					
b. Public Safety	5	5	5	5	5
Total Rating	75	54	42	24	28

Rating	Description
0–1	**Critical Deficiency** – Absent or grossly inadequate; does not support even minimal functionality.
2–3	**Substandard Provision** – Available but inconsistent quality, insufficient in coverage, or poorly maintained.
4	**Baseline Compliance** – Present and operational, meeting the minimum expected standards.
5	**Comprehensive Compliance** – Comprehensive fully functional, and maintained to standards, ideally under the supervision of a responsible authority (e.g., AMC or equivalent).

Score	Performance level
<20	Severely Inadequate
20-40	Minimally Equipped
41-60	Functionally Adequate
61-79	Efficient & Supportive
80	Model Standard

The paved area at Naroda Chowk enables orderly waiting, negotiation, and circulation, while demarcated IPT movement supports smooth traffic flow without disrupting site functions. With a score of 75, **Naroda** is a developed chowk functioning as a key node, supported by adequate space, service proximity, and BoCW facilitation.

Naroda Labour Chowk waiting area with water facility, washrooms and ample shaded seating.

Naroda Labour Chowk at 9 am in the morning.

Sarkhej (54), a linear footpath-based Chowk, presents a halfway mark, structured but amenities underserved, sprawl seen and amenities not fulfilling the needs.

Overflow in designated waiting zones at Sarkhej Chowk reveals functional site gaps and limited capacity to accommodate peak-hour crowds

The designated waiting zones, while experiencing overflow, cannot accomodate women and children

In Contrast **Gurukul** scores 24, reflecting deep infrastructural gaps despite steady usage—situated on a private vacant plot with no amenities in place.

Temple platform repurposed as informal seating, underscoring the absence of designated amenities and infrastructure

Workers waiting on the premises of the Gurukul ground lacking sanitation facilities and formal infrastructure

Valinathnagar (42) emerges as a dispersed Chowk across multiple pockets, where informal infrastructure like BRTS railings serve as makeshift seating.

In the absence of seating, women rest under trees while others occupy BRTS railings, highlighting improvised use of available urban elements.

Workers gather under the flyover and along footpaths at Valinath Chowk, Ahmedabad.

Akhbarnagar (28) remains in early stages, with limited support systems.

Labourers line a 150-metre stretch along shopfronts, medians, and streets, illustrating the dispersed nature of early-stage chowks with minimal support systems.

The lack of urban infrastructure expedites congestion problems within the roads.

Design Standards

Sr.	Design Feature	Component	Standard codes &	Description	QR Code of Standards/ Codes
1	**Thermal Comfort**	Landscape Development	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 10, Sec 1 (Landscape Planning & Development)	Tree-lined peripheries and low-maintenance plantings	
		Tree Grates/ Guards	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 10, Sec 1.6 (Landscape Elements)	Metal tree grates for pedestrian and tree protection	
2	**Street Infrastructure**	Seating	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 10, Sec 1.8 (Street Furniture)	Ergonomic benches with backrest (elderly-safe)	
		Bollards	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 10, Sec 1.8 (Street Furniture)	RCC, 450 mm height, 100 mm dia, 0.6–0.9 m spacing	
		Street Lighting	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 8, Sec 1.3.6 (Lighting)	30 lux minimum illumination level	
		Crossings	IRC:35–2015, Sec 8.3.2 (Pedestrian Facilities)	Zebra crossings with retro-reflective paint	
3	**Utilities**	Utilities (general)	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 9 (Plumbing Services), Sec 1–4; ULB Service Guidelines	Provision for water, sewerage, power (junction boxes), telecom	
4	**Amenities**	Toilets & Water Facilities	CPHEEO O&M Manual 2005, Ch. 9, Sec 9.3.2	1 WC/50 persons, 1 urinal/20 males	
		Waste Bins	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 9, Sec 3 (Solid Waste Management)	Twin-bin system, spaced every 50 m	
5	**Pavements**	Pathways	Harmonised Guidelines 2015, Sec 7.1 (Kerb Ramps), Sec 5.3 (Floor Surfaces)	1.8 m width, tactile pavers, curb ramps (1:12)	
		Tactile Tiles	Harmonised Guidelines 2015, Sec 5.3 (Floor Surfaces), Annex Tables	Guidelines for tactile walking surface indicators	
6	**Street Vending**	Space Requirement per Unit	NUTP 2014, Ch. 8.1–8.2; Street Vendors Act 2014	Allocated vending zones, ~2–3 m² per stationary vendor (as per ULB vending policy)	
7	**Parking**	Allocated spaces for NMT & IPT	NUTP 2014, Ch. 8.4 (Parking); Local ULB Parking Policy	On-site parking, prioritised for NMT & IPT, provision subject to spatial limits	
8	**Signage**	Public Signage	NBC 2016 Vol 2, Part 10, Sec 2 (Signs & Outdoor Display Structures)	Dynamic signboards, wage info, regulatory notices	

9	**Safety**	Crossings, Lighting, Layout	NBC 2016 Vol 1, Part 3 (Development Control Rules); IRC:35–2015, Sec 8.3; Local ULB Safety Guidelines	Spatial buffers, surveillance, secured zones, regulated access	
10	**Walkability / Mobility**	Pathways, Seating, Vending	NBC 2016 Vol 1, Part 3 (General Requirements); Harmonised Guidelines 2015, Sec 5.1–5.15; NUTP 2014, Ch. 3	Cohesive, people-first design with shared public space strategy	

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The Naroda Labour Chowk provides a better example of formal infrastructutre for Labourers waiting at Labour Chowks.

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